

NCTE Promising Young Writers Program

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING THE HOLISTIC WRITING EVALUATION SCALE

To help judges differentiate between good compositions and poor ones, the following is intended to represent strengths and weaknesses in terms of factors that should enter into the judgment of a written composition. Judges determine gradations of these qualities between 6 and 1, remembering that these writers are in the eighth grade.

STRENGTHS

CONTENT

- Independence of thought
- Writer's engagement with topic
- Fresh insights

PURPOSE/AUDIENCE/TONE

- Focus and intent clear and consistent
- Language and tone appropriate to purpose and audience

WORDS: CHOICE AND ARRANGEMENT

- Concern for expressiveness and clear communication
- Apt choice of words
- Readable, unambiguous sentences

ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

- Logical progression, easy to follow
- Adequate support and elaboration
- Sense of completeness and closure, meaningful paragraphing

STYLE

- Fluent, readable prose
- Sentence structure treated flexibly
- Appropriate use of metaphor, analogy, parallelism, and other rhetorical devices
- Occasional willingness to be daring in thought and word; signs of inventiveness

TECHNICAL QUALITIES, MECHANICS

- Sustained point of view; tenses used appropriately
- Grammatical accuracy
- Punctuation use for clarity and effect
- Respect for manuscript conventions: spelling, capitalization, hyphenation

QUALITIES ESPECIALLY APPLICABLE TO FICTION, DRAMA, AND POETRY

- Keen observation and reflection
- Imaginative insight
- Sensitivity to nuances of words
- Control of formal elements: point of view, chronology
- Effective use of figurative language

WEAKNESSES

CONTENT

- Preponderance of obvious statements
- Writer uninvolved with topic
- Subject treated perfunctorily

PURPOSE/AUDIENCE/TONE

- Purpose unclear or unrealized
- Tone inconsistent or uncontrolled

WORDS: CHOICE AND ARRANGEMENT

- Limited vocabulary or misuse of words
- Indulges in clichés
- Awkward or faulty sentences

ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

- Little sense of direction or organization
- Few particulars or examples offered as support
- Intent of paragraphing unclear

STYLE

- Prose either effusive or cramped
- Unvaried sentence structure
- General absence of rhetorical devices
- Tendency to play safe with words and ideas

TECHNICAL QUALITIES, MECHANICS

- Point of view unclear
- Grammatical errors
- Punctuation errors

QUALITIES ESPECIALLY APPLICABLE TO FICTION, DRAMA, AND POETRY

- Absence of meaningful detail
- Unimaginative
- Use of hackneyed words and phrases
- Lack of facility with formal elements
- Failure to accomplish desired effect

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HOLISTIC WRITING EVALUATION SCALE

Upper-half papers make clear a definite purpose, supported with varying degrees of effectiveness. They also have a structure that shows evidence of some deliberate planning. The writer's control of English usage ranges from fairly reliable at 4 to confident and accomplished at 6.

6 Papers scored as a 6 tend to offer sophisticated ideas within an organizational framework that is clear and appropriate for the topic. The supporting statements are particularly effective because of their substance, specificity, or illustrative quality. The writing is vivid and precise, though it may contain an occasional flaw. The potential in the writing is fully developed for the eighth grade with distinguishing characteristics that give the writing an identity of its own.

5 Papers scored as a 5 are clearly organized with effective support for each of the writer's major points. The writing offers substantive ideas, though the paper may lack the flair or grace of a 6 paper. The surface features are consistently under control, despite an occasional lapse in usage. The potential in the writing is realized showing competence with language and control in the development of the topic.

4 Papers scored as a 4 show evidence of the writer's organizational plan. Support, though sufficient, tends to be less extensive or convincing than that found in papers scored as a 5 or 6. The writer generally observes the conventions of accepted English usage. Some errors are usually present, but they aren't severe enough to interfere significantly with the writer's main purpose. The potential in the writing is evident, but unevenness suggests that the writer is not yet in full command of the composing process.

Lower-half papers either fail to convey a purpose sufficiently or lack one entirely. Consequently, their structure ranges from rudimentary at 3, to random at 2, to absent at 1. Control of the conventions of English usage tends to follow this same gradient.

3 Papers scored as a 3 usually show some evidence of planning or development. However, the organization is often limited to a simple listing of haphazard recitation of ideas about the topic, leaving an impression of insufficiency. The 3 papers often demonstrate repeated weaknesses in accepted English usage and are generally ineffective in accomplishing the writer's purpose. The potential in the writing is partially indicated, but limited by shortcomings that call undue attention to themselves.

2 Papers scored as a 2 are characterized by a marked lack of development or inadequate support for ideas. The level of thought apparent in the writing is frequently unsophisticated or superficial, often marked by a listing of unsupported generalizations. Instead of suggesting a clear purpose, these papers often present conflicting purposes. Errors in accepted English usage may seriously interfere with the overall effectiveness in these papers. The potential in the writing is obscured by major flaws in the thought and development of the writing.

1 Papers scored as a 1 leave the impression that the writer has not accomplished a purpose, and has not made any purpose apparent. The dominant feature of these papers is the lack of control. The writer stumbles both in conveying a clear plan for the paper and in expressing ideas according to the conventions of accepted English usage. The potential in the writing is undeveloped.